

How the Committee on Minority Affairs is catalyzing change

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In 1993, the American Chemical Society organized and charged the Committee on Minority Affairs (CMA) to develop and oversee the Society's long-range plans and programs to ensure, promote, and recognize the participation and accomplishments of minorities. CMA has taken this charge and developed a mission statement that aligns with that of the Society: advancing a broader, inclusive and equitable chemistry enterprise by empowering underrepresented groups, stakeholders, and marginalized peoples for the benefit of the world. To that end, we have developed three major goals that will help us to achieve this mission: 1) Increase diversity awareness by providing professional development and recognition opportunities to underrepresented groups within the chemical sciences; 2) Strengthen ACS programming to reflect a broader, inclusive and equitable chemistry enterprise; and 3) Enhance shared expertise in effective diversity, equity, and inclusion content and act as a resource to societal stakeholders. These goals are ambitious and require partnerships across geographical and technical backgrounds. While some of this work will require leadership from the national committee, catalyzing this type of broader change requires the buy-in, input, support and energy from intellectual leaders, advocates, and members at the local level. Does your local section have a minority affairs committee? Has your regional meeting thought about ways to highlight the Society's diversity, inclusion, and respect core value? Is your technical division interested in developing strategies to diversify your speakers list? We are looking for partners who want to help carry out our vision of diversifying chemistry through the transforming power of equity and inclusion.

From a programmatic perspective, CMA has planned two umbrella symposia for 2020. This spring, our Presidential Symposium is entitled "Reimagining Diversity & Equity in honor of Robert Lichter". Monday, March 30th will include talks discussing Robert Lichter's work and his impact on ACS, chemistry, education, diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as showcase successful programs that continue this vision and give ideas for local implementation. We also look forward to our luncheon keynote address that will be given by ACS President Luis Echegoyen. In addition, we are excited to be offering our first set of publicly available workshops! We invite your graduate students and postdoctoral trainees to pre-register for the workshop entitled "Career Launch and Acceleration for Minority Graduate Students & Postdocs" facilitated by COACH; and for junior faculty, faculty mentors and training directors to pre-register for the "Incorporating Expectations and Communication into Mentoring Relationships to Promote Equity & Inclusion" facilitated by the National Mentoring Research Network (NRMN). Please refer to the meeting planner to learn about the specifics about these and our other associated events.

Our fall national meeting symposium is entitled "Colloidal Dispersions and Complex Fluid Interfaces: Symposium in Honor of Bettye Washington Greene". This thematic lead symposium will honor Dr. Greene, the first African-American female Ph.D. chemist employed in a professional position at The Dow Chemical Company and will highlight her accomplishments, as well as other diverse chemical practitioners in the colloidal technical division and industrial chemistry spaces. There will also be poster sessions for educators who have developed programs geared towards educating/training our diverse learners to enter these spaces, and for diverse talent looking for future opportunities. We are also looking for technical divisions wanting to partner to address equity topics/issues in their programming.

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CMA will continue our educational efforts to advance the ACS core value of “diversity, inclusion and respect”. As such, we will provide society wide support to implement best practices aligned with the ACS goals towards member education, empowerment, support, and communication. We take this opportunity to expose the membership interested in participating in this space to two important terms: equality and equity.

Equality, is a complex but familiar term from a mathematical framework. However, it is broader with political, economic, and social implications. Equality suggests that we are comparing identical entities with respect to some stated attributes. However, our various backgrounds and experiences cause us to development into people with very specific biological, emotional, scientific, and historical attributes that will never to be equal to another.

Equity is a better term for discussing the remedy to those inequalities of experience. Historical biases and systems have caused unequal ethnic representation in education and science. While we highlight chemists like Percy Julian, Rosalind Franklin, Marie Daley, and St. Elmo Brady; we diminish their accomplishments if not told within the context of the educational and occupational inequities they experienced. Many of these inequities still persist and are currently experienced by our fellow members. Therefore, CMA continues to seek partnerships to remedy the barriers to diverse representation in societal programming and education efforts.

CMA is happy to help provide further insights and resources as to how you can help move the Society forward to being a more locally and globally welcoming environment. Check out our webpage, www.chemdiversity.org, for more information on how to become an active advocate, recognize those who have made a difference by being an advocate, and get resources for programming to encourage and promote diverse scientists.